

TRIBUTE

Joy is contagious; a tribute to Colwyn Trevarthen

Philippa Derrington

Queen Margaret University Edinburgh, UK

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Philippa Derrington has worked as a music therapist in different contexts. Her experience of working alongside young people has shaped her dialogic approach to teaching and learning. She is a Senior Lecturer, leads the MSc Music Therapy at Queen Margaret University Edinburgh, and serves as Liaison Editor for *Approaches: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Music Therapy*. [pderrington@qmu.ac.uk]

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I first met Colwyn many years ago when I was a music therapy student at Anglia Polytechnic University in Cambridge. Through his lively, humorous, and engaging teaching style, he helped us to understand how babies communicate and the musicality of early dyadic interactions. Colwyn's input to our training was so essential to our understanding of intersubjectivity, and his reminder to "let the child lead the way!" has stayed with me in my own teaching with music therapy students.

When I saw Colwyn last year in 2023, he was due to teach students at Queen Margaret University (QMU) as he had done every year since the early days of the course in Edinburgh. I met him in the reception area, he told me that he had lost his walking stick and so had come without it. It was a moment that reminded me how committed Colwyn was to teaching, his enjoyment of meeting new students and his unwavering enthusiasm for sharing his latest thinking and research. It was also a rather heart-stopping moment for me as I realised that he had walked unaided across the university square from the taxi drop-off! Colwyn himself seemed unphased but delighted when we sourced another walking stick.

As we headed off to the lecture theatre for him to meet the new cohort of music, drama and art therapy students, he talked to me about work and seemed to delight in making suggestions about who I should next meet. He was passionate about connecting people around the world and I am grateful for the many links he has sparked. While settling in to teach, I was struck, as always, how he was able to multi-task; setting up his laptop, whilst also discussing new ideas in music therapy, mentioning

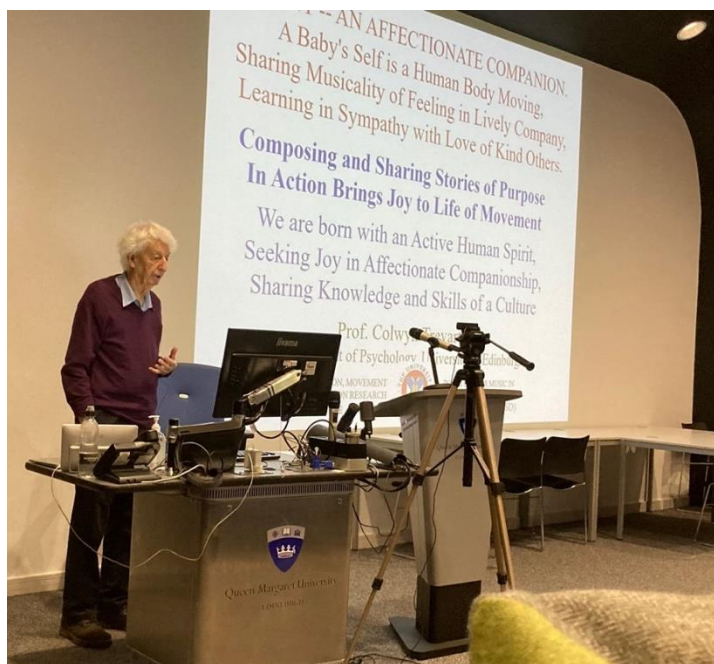


Photo 1: Professor Colwyn Trevarthen, aged 90, teaching at QMU

his latest piece of research, and wondering whether his presentation with over 200 slides was too long. It was hard to keep up!

Despite extensive travels and demands on his time, Colwyn always prioritised teaching music therapy students. He even continued when we were all working online during the Covid-19 pandemic. Once, after some difficulty at the start of a seminar with the students, while we all negotiated a new online platform, I asked Colwyn if he'd like to go and get a drink before we began; "No I think I'll have a lie down!" he responded laughingly. This connected the whole group and through his good humour, we were able to acknowledge the trouble we were all experiencing working online, and how tiring it could be.

As Colwyn lived locally to QMU, the students were lucky to meet him every year, even after he had stopped travels to other courses for such teaching and "adventures with busy companions," to use his own words. Every year Colwyn carefully considered where the students were in their learning and collaborated closely with me in terms of his input. For example, when the MSc in Dramatherapy was established and joined the class of music and art therapy students for the first time in 2021, he specifically thought of them, exploring the ideas of psychologist Jerome Bruner "that in all our clever enterprises of cultural practice we are wanting to share stories with drama and pride" (C. Trevarthen, personal communication, August 2021). His teaching was inspiring, and the particularly long line of students waiting to talk to him at the end of that lecture was evidence not just of their interest in his teaching, but of his enthusiasm to share in their ideas, and develop thinking together. His excitement for learning and for sharing ideas and resources seemed to know no bounds. One year, the students' virtual learning environment crashed because I had tried to upload the abundance of online resources Colwyn had shared with me!

It wasn't just the vast content that Colwyn taught though, or the implications for our music therapy practice; we learned because of his creativity, affection, imagination and humour. Colwyn taught the important central issue of joyful play through being joyfully playful and I learned something from every encounter with him. As we were chatting on the phone one time, Colwyn saw a delivery man through his front room window, and immediately began relaying his movements to me. For Colwyn, the delivery man was "walking *andante*, as adults do," but as he manoeuvred his way around the van he began to "waltz." I remember him then saying, "he doesn't necessarily know it's a waltz, of course, but isn't it wonderful that all forms of life are rhythmic, moving with cautious steps into experience of the future, and enjoying discovery".

It was a joy to get to know Colwyn. I will remember his generosity, his attention to being with, his soft curiosity, and his ever so kind company. Thank you, Colwyn, we will miss you.

p.s. In an email after his last lecture, Colwyn wrote:

"Dear Philippa,
I wanted to let you know that my stick turned up
lying in the shadow of a step in our big tower staircase,
a present from the robust weavers
who had it built 400 years ago!"